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SUBJECT: PLANNING FOR KADHIMIYA PILGRIMAGE SHOWS INCREASED ISF CAPACITY

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¶1. (U) SUMMARY: The absence of sectarian violence at the August 9 annual pilgrimage to the tomb of the 7th Imam Musa Kadhim in the Kadhimiyah neighborhood of Baghdad provided evidence of increased coordination capacity of the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF), compared to last year, in which some 20 pilgrims died. The preparations were also noteworthy for the high level of coordination between the several Iraqi security agencies, ministries and the press. While the Coalition Forces (CF) participated to a certain extent, this security effort was principally an Iraqi effort. An Iraqi official noted that many of the lessons from this plan could be applied to future religious holidays, such as the upcoming Shabaniyah 12th Imam celebration. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Increased and better coordinated preparations by an array of GOI security forces to counter any terrorist attacks during the Imam Musa Kadhim pilgrimage on August 9 paid off, as demonstrated by the absence of violence and loss of life. The ISF coordinated security preparations through the Iraqi Baghdad Operations Command (BOC), the unified command operationally responsible for all security forces in Baghdad. Drawing on its forces of two Iraqi Army (IA) divisions, the BOC held extensive planning meetings that included reviews of past mistakes, and better measures to ensure the safety of the pilgrims, according to CF liaison officers to the BOC. Opining that the confidence of the Iraqi people in some areas regarding the ISF has increased, the BOC Commander pointed out that he believed the pilgrims demonstrated overt acts of "trusting the security forces" as a legitimate arm of the government.

¶3. (SBU) The BOC used intelligence to identify potential threats and developed appropriate countermeasures to address those threats. The BOC then coordinated those plans with all the appropriate entities of the ISF, Ministry of Interior (MOI), Ministry of Health (MOH), Ministry of Transportation (MOT), local authorities, and the press. According to COL Abd Al-Amir, BOC Plans Officer, this coordinated effort is the &first time in the history of Iraq8 that all the ISF elements have worked together to such a degree. The execution of the operational plan was slightly impeded, however, below the brigade level due to an institutional absence of consultation with lower echelon officers prior to the execution phase. The BOC decision to keep the security plans for the annual pilgrimage close-hold until relatively

late in the game meant that leadership on the ground was not afforded maximum time to coordinate and implement the plan. MNF-I observers indicated that the After Action Review (AAR) was markedly candid and constructively critical of the operation. Although AARs are often used within Armed Forces within the Middle East, this event was marked by the exceptionally unfamiliar concept to Iraq and, more or less, in the region of being constructively critical in an open forum to benefit and improve future planning and operations.

LESSONS LEARNED FROM PREVIOUS YEARS

14. (U) Though the ISF planned extensively for the security of last year's pilgrimage (reftel), planning was insufficient to prevent the tragic death of some 20 worshipers who were killed by snipers positioned along the pilgrimage routes. This year, the ISF took extensive precautions to secure those routes from sniper fire in advance by identifying likely sniper positions, and securing them in advance. In addition, last year, many pilgrims were attacked when they strayed from the designated routes. Accordingly, the ISF took care to demarcate and secure designated routes, and used the media to implore pilgrims to stay on the designated routes. This year the ISF also took measures to brief pilgrims on safety procedures.

15. (U) The National Police (NP) had control of the Khadimiyah Shrine middle cordon check points, and performed the vehicle and physical searches of people entering the Kadhimiyah Shrine immediate-control area (40 female screeners were employed by NP to screen and assess female pilgrims entering the cordon). The Iraqi Police (IP) augmented these efforts by having control over the interior cordon closest to the Kadimiyah Shrine while also assisting the NP in patrolling the streets

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immediate to the Shrine and within the confines of the district. The route was demarcated by the IA, based upon historical information obtained during past pilgrimages. Coordination between IA, NP and IP ensured security of the route with patrols augmented with multiple checkpoints. ISF preparations also included public service announcement warning of the possibility of tainted (possibly intentionally poisoned) food, which occurred in the past.

16. (U) The greatest casualty-producing threat to the pilgrims was the potential for a mass casualty attack using a vehicle borne improvised explosive devices. The ISF coordinated with the MOT to implement a complete vehicle ban in Baghdad. This ban was publicized well in advance so that Iraqis and pilgrims could plan their schedules accordingly. The most likely threat to the pilgrims was the potential for indirect fire (IDF) from mortars and rockets. The ISF coordinated with CF to implement increased focused air weapons presence within the area of operation specifically monitoring historical point of origin sites for IDF. In addition, the ISF worked with the MOH to ensure that sufficient ambulances were pre-positioned in strategic locations in the event of any attack. Further, ISF coordinated with CF to provide stand-by air ambulance in the event of a mass casualty incident.

AN IRAQI SHOW

17. (U) Iraqis led the security preparations for this event from start to finish. The ISF coordinated with the CF on many levels, and CF personnel deployed to support the ISF, notably in using CF assets to protect against IDF, and with helicopter support. The ISF, nevertheless, carried out the planning and most of the execution of this operation. On balance, the ISF, particularly the BOC, conducted effective planning for the operation, and continues to concentrate on coordination with its lower echelon commanders and senior ministerial officials in order to facilitate better execution.

18. (U) COMMENT: One key factor in the success of this security operation is that more ISF personnel than in previous years have become available with the appropriate training. The ISF has begun to reap the fruit of CF training programs. What remains to be seen is whether the successes of this pilgrimage can be leveraged into institutional standard operational procedures for similar events. END COMMENT.

CROCKER